

MINUTES
ST. JOHNSBURY SELECTBOARD
SPECIAL SELECTBOARD MEETING
MONDAY, APRIL 7, 2008

The St. Johnsbury SelectBoard held a Special SelectBoard meeting on Monday, April 7, 2008 beginning at 5:00p.m. in the Board Room of the Municipal Building.

SelectBoard Members Present: Chairperson Bryon Quatrini, Gary Reis, Daniel Kimbell, Jim Rust, and Jean Hall Wheeler.

Others Present: Priscilla Messier, Representative Sandra Grenier, David Burley (VT Dept. of Buildings & Grounds), Stan Wilkins, Michael Gonyaw, Richard Hall, Joel Schwartz, Senator George Coppentrath, Taylor Reed, and Town Manager Mike Welch.

CALL TO ORDER: Bryon Quatrini called the meeting to order with the Pledge at approximately 5:10p.m.

CALEDONIA WORK CAMP PHASED EXPANSION – 20 BEDS PHASE 1 – The Manager informed the Board that he met on Friday, April 4th with David Peebles (Department of Corrections) and Gerry Meyers (Commissioner of State Buildings & Grounds) to discuss the State’s plans relative to the Caledonia Work Camp in St. Johnsbury. David Burley, VT Department of Buildings and Grounds, informed the SelectBoard that it is his understanding that the State is still interested in expanding the Work Camp in St. Johnsbury, but that this expansion would be done in phases. David said that the initial phase would be placing an additional 20 beds in the existing facility. David said that there is still a need in Vermont for more Work Camp beds. David said that the State is moving forward with a plan to close the Dale Women’s Correctional Facility in Waterbury; move the prisoners from Windsor to St. Albans; and use the Windsor facility as a Work Camp. David said that it is his understanding that the State is willing to pro-rate their offer to St. Johnsbury to \$200,000 in capital payment, \$10,000 for Payment in Lieu of Taxes, a work crew available at no cost for 10-20 weeks (that would have to be scheduled in advance).

The Manager said that Commissioner Meyers indicated that they would like to make the capital payment over a period of several years. The Manager said that David Peebles indicated that there would be four new positions at the Work Camp, and these may be employee transfers from other facilities.

Daniel Kimbell said that the Town should have a formal proposal in writing, so that everyone is clear about what is being proposed. Gary Reis said that he was not pleased with the bait & switch tactics that the State has used in terms of the Work Camp proposal.

Priscilla Messier said that she wanted to make it clear that if the State of Vermont wants to put 20 more beds in the existing facility, they would still need to apply for a permit from the Development Review Board (DRB) as the facility is permitted for 100 beds.

Priscilla said that local permitting officials were told by Mr. Burley in 1992 that there not be any more than 100 beds in the Work Camp, as the facility was not designed to support more than that.

Mike Gonyaw said he was opposed the expansion project to begin with, because he believes it is selling St. Johnsbury short. Mike Gonyaw said that this project was proposed to the voters as 100 beds and \$1,000,000 – and now you are talking about putting 20 beds in the existing facility and \$200,000. Mike Gonyaw said he also has concerns about consolidating the superintendents, which he said State officials said they would not do, but he understands that this is being done. Mike Gonyaw said that he does not agree with the Department of Corrections position that the work camp crews do not take work away from private contractors. Mr. Gonyaw said that he knows from local roofing contractors that work camp crews have done work that would have been done by private contractors. Mike Gonyaw said that the State never had a building plan for expanding the facility, and they should have had an actual plan before asking the Town to support expanding the Work Camp. Mike Gonyaw said that he did not believe that the SelectBoard has any authority to accept a proposal to put 20 more beds in the existing facility – as a permit from the DRB is required.

The Manager said the SelectBoard is not acting in a permitting capacity, but would be acting as the legislative body of behalf of the community – expressing their position on this project, as they do for any number of projects. The SelectBoard would condition any agreement on receipt of proper local and state permits, including permitting by the DRB.

Richard Hall said that his biggest concern with the proposal is overcrowding in the Work Camp. Richard said that putting an additional 20 beds into the existing building would be a mistake.

Gary Reis said that he wonders what the future of corrections is in the State. Gary said that he has heard that Corrections Corporation of America has been looking into Vermont.

Senator George Copenrath said that there are a lot of moving pieces. Senator Copenrath said that the current plan to close Dale and use Windsor is not new – and that the Legislature has been trying to come up with an overall proposal that will not result in a significant increase in expense.

Jim Rust stated that putting 20 more beds in that facility is going to make it very tight. Jim Rust said he questioned whether the State would ever proceed with an actual building expansion project once the 20 beds are in place.

Joel Schwartz said that what is being proposed here is a very different project than was approved by the voters. Joel said that he believed that the SelectBoard should go back to the voters before entering any agreement.

The Manager stated that he agreed with Daniel Kimbell that we should get a written proposal from the State – but, regardless of the terms of actual terms it is not what was originally proposed. The Manager said that he felt that the Board should only consider bringing something back to the voters if it is something that the Board supports.

Sandy Grenier asked what the wording of the question was that the voters approved. The Manager got the wording of the Article – “I move, under Article 8, that the Town vote to authorize the Selectmen to enter into an agreement with the State of Vermont to expand the Caledonia Community Work Camp on land owned by the State of Vermont.”

Mike Gonyaw said that the SelectBoard should not be using the wording of this question to find a way to support a project that is very different that what was approved at Town Meeting.

Gary Reis said that the SelectBoard supported the expansion of the Work Camp by 100 beds, for many good reasons. Gary suggested that when the State is ready to move forward with that project, then they should come back to St. Johnsbury.

It was moved by Gary Reis seconded by Jim Rust, and unanimously voted (5-0) that the SelectBoard inform the State of Vermont that they do not support an interim measure of adding 20 beds inside the existing facility, and that when the State is ready to move forward with the 100-bed expansion project, then they should come back to St. Johnsbury.

It was moved by Jim Rust, seconded by Daniel Kimbell, and unanimously voted (5-0) to adjourn at approximately 5:50p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Mike Welch
Town Manager